

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 IO-14 ISO-00 INT-05 SOE-02
AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 DOE-15 H-02
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-05 ICA-20
OES-07 SP-02 SS-15 STR-07 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 PA-02
/164 W

-----057399 261534Z /64

R 261100Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1102
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

UNCLAS PRETORIA 2440

CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EMIM, ENRG, WA
SUBJECT: ROSSING URANIUM MINE: FULL PRODUCTION FINALLY
FORESEEN IN 1979

SUMMARY: THE GREAT ROSSING URANIUM MINE IN NAMIBIA IS NOW
EXPECTED TO REACH FULL PRODUCTION OF 5,000 TONS/YEAR BY
THE END OF 1978. MACHINERY DESIGN AND RELATED PROBLEMS
HAVE CAUSED A DELAY OF TWO YEARS AND INCREASED COST OF
PROJECT BY FIFTY PERCENT. END SUMMARY

1. PRESS REPORTS THAT RIO TINTO - ZINC HAS ANNOUNCED IN
LONDON THAT ROSSING MINE PRODUCED 3042 SHORT TONS OF
URANIUM OXIDE IN 1977 COMPARED TO 776 TONS IN 1976. BY
THIRD QUARTER OF 1978 RATE WOULD BE 4,000 TONS AND BY END
OF YEAR FULL PRODUCTION OF 5,000 TONS IS EXPECTED, TWO
YEARS LATER THAN ORIGINALLY PROJECTED.

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2. RIO TINTO'S ANNUAL REPORT SAYS OPERATION OF UNDER-
GROUND MINE WAS POSTPONED TO EFFECT PLANT CHANGES WHICH
WILL BECOME OPERATIONAL IN THIRD QUARTER OF 1978.
MILLING CAPACITY IS TO BE INCREASED TO 40,000 TONS/DAY
AND RECOVERY RAISED TO 85 PERCENT. NEW CAPITAL AND LOANS
AMOUNTING TO \$100 MILLION WERE ARRANGED TO FINANCE

THESE CHANGES WHICH MEANS TOTAL COST OF PROJECT IS NOW
NEARLY \$300 MILLION.

3. COMMENT: DURING MEETING LAST MONTH, A ROSSING
OFFICIAL SAID PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED WERE:

(A) SHORTCOMINGS IN EQUIPMENT;

(B) HIGH ABRASIVENESS OF ORE (WHICH HAD BEEN
KNOWN BUT DAMAGED TO PUMPS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT WAS
GREATER THAN EXPECTED;

(C) GREATER VARIATIONS IN RICHNESS OF ORE THAN
EQUIPMENT WAS DESIGNED TO HANDLE.

OFFICIAL SAID THAT, WHILE DECISION TO UNDERTAKE HEAVY NEW
INVESTMENT WAS A DIFFICULT ONE, IT HAD BECOME APPARENT RIGHT
CHOICE HAD BEEN MADE.

4. WHILE OFFICIAL DID NOT MENTION IT, WE HAVE BEEN
TOLD THERE WAS ALSO A MAJOR OVERHAUL OF MANAGEMENT LATE
IN 1977. U.S. ENGINEERING FIRM OF WEBB AND KNAPP IS NOT,
HOWEVER, BLAMED FOR DIFFICULTIES.

5. UNDERGROUND MINE WAS ABANDONED WHEN CROSS-CUT SECT-
IONS REVEALED THAT THIS RICHER ORE BODY WAS VERY IR-
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REGULAR. EVENTUAL EXPLOITATION IS NEVERTHELESS FORESEEN.

6. A NEWLY ISSUED BROCHURE WITH CERTAIN ADDITIONAL
DETAILS IS BEING POUCHED TO INTERESTED OFFICES IN
WASHINGTON.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Drafter: n/a
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